A GLIMPSE OF ARYA SAMAJ PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

"A glimpse of Arya Samaj" presents a concise view of Arya Samaj, their principles, and their source of aspirations - the Vedas, the root of many religions of the world. Revival of Vedas in recent times and establishment of Arya Samaj has rightly been credited to Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati. Since my initial encounter with Arya Samaj in the early 1990s, I have seen volumes of literature written on Arya Samaj. My sole purpose compiling this booklet is to provide a simplified and basic understanding of the subject matter in a clear and concise form to a lay person who has had no prior exposure to Arya Samaj.

As there are no deities in Vedic temples, most of the people view Arya Samaj as an atheist organization. To the contrary, Arya Samaj believes in the superconscious, formless energy, the Almighty, the creator and the sustainer of the universe, their main focus being on the ultimate reality and not on the messengers, the saviors, or the prophets. My sincere hope is that after reading this booklet, the reader may develop enough curiosity so as to dig into the vast ancient knowledge embedded in Vedas, its associated commentaries, and the most recent addition of "Satyarth Prakash", a masterpiece by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati.

Om P. Arora

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Om P. Arora

MAHARSHI DAYANAND SARASWATI

FEBRUARY 12TH 1824 – OCTOBER 30TH 1883

GAYATRI MAHAMANTRA (VEDIC PRAYER)

Aum bhoor bhuvah swah,
Tat-savitur varenyam,
Bhargo devasya dheemahi,
Dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat.

You are the giver of life to us,
You nurture you foster this grand universe,
We find the vigor of life through you,
Remover of sufferings, bestower of bliss |
We see your splendor abound the world,
We sense your presence in every object,
We ponder we pray thy mercy my God,
Guide us on to a noble path ||

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ARYA SAMAJ
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

An **Arya** is a person of noble qualities, nature, and activities. He seeks truth, righteousness, and freedom in every aspect of life without regard to color, creed, race, nationality, or origin of the person. He believes in and worships the omnipresent, formless, supreme soul, the Almighty referred in Vedas as OM.

Arya Samaj is a congregation of noble and like minded individuals who follow the tenets of Vedas, the root of many religions of the world and the source of true knowledge. The very first Arya Samaj was established by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati along with his followers in Bombay (Mumbai), India on April 10th, 1875, with the sole purpose of disseminating true knowledge of Vedas and removing all the ills of the universal society and Indian population at large. Since then, Arya Samaj has established its offshoots all over the world practicing and preaching Vedic values and spreading the true message of Vedas, their ultimate motto being to make "the whole world noble and the whole world as one big family".

Arya Samaj promotes peace, harmony, spirituality, non-violence, Yog and Meditation.

PRINCIPLES OF ARYA SAMAJ

These ten principles are the foundation stones of Arya Samaj and a guide to humanity at large.

1. Eeshwar/God (Almighty Ishwar) is the primary source of all true knowledge and all that is known by its means.
2. Eeshwar/God is ever existent, intelligent, blissful, formless, omnipotent, just, merciful, unborn, infinite, flawless, beginningless, endless, incomparable, support of all, master of all, omnipresent, controller of all, ageless, immortal, fearless, eternal, holy and creator of the universe. He alone is worthy of worship.
3. The Vedas are the scriptures of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all Aryas (noble persons) to study them, teach them, recite them, and listen to them being read.
4. One should always be ready to accept the truth and renounce untruth.
5. All acts should be performed in accordance with dharma (righteousness) after deliberating right from wrong.
6. The prime object of Arya Samaj is to do good to the world and to "make the whole world noble", that is to promote physical, spiritual, and social wellbeing of everyone.
7. Our conduct towards everyone should be unbiased, guided by love, righteousness, and justice.
8. One should dispel ignorance and promote knowledge.
9. No one should be content with promoting their own wellbeing only. On the contrary one should regard their wellbeing in the wellbeing of others.
10. For the wellbeing of society, one should subordinate his efforts. For his personal well being one is free to enjoy the freedom of action.

VEDAS

Concept of Arya Samaj is based on the teachings of Vedas. The Vedas are the pillars of Vedic traditions. There have been different views as to the origin of Vedas. According to Indian scholars, this divine knowledge of Vedas was bestowed or imparted by the Almighty to mankind, through some righteous and learned souls, for their welfare in the very beginning of creation of the universe. This view is based on the facts that all Vedas have true and unbiased physical and metaphysical knowledge. There is no prior history recorded in Vedas and this knowledge was imparted in the very beginning of human creation in the most ancient language that is Vedic Sanskrit. These are original guides to righteous materialistic and religious living with the primary goal of human life being self-realization, Eeshwar/God realization and salvation. In the beginning they were transmitted from one generation to the next by oral memorization and repetitions. When the capacity of memorizing these verses decreased in humans, they were written on leaves, tablets, and paper etc.

As per western scholars, their origin is recent, that is 8000 to 10000 years. Whatever it may be, they still have the glory of being the oldest books of knowledge in the library of mankind. They are the basis of dharma, spirituality, philosophy, culture, sciences, and have limitless knowledge. All these Vedas were simultaneous productions. As many words in Sanskrit can have different meanings, Vedic mantras have been interpreted differently depending on the depth of knowledge of the scholars. Vedas contain root principles of sciences but it's up to the individuals to expound on them like theosophy, mathematics, astrology, astronomy, sociology, psychology, ecology, politics, warfare, music (Gandharva vidya) and medicine (Ayurveda) etc.

The Vedas are four different books containing different sets of knowledge. These are the manuals for righteous and religious living.

Rig-Ved - Knowledge
Yajur-Ved - action
Sam-Ved - worship
Atharv-Ved – sciences

1. **Rig-Ved** contains 10552 mantras or hymns. These hymns are read in poetic form. In essence they explain about the attributes, nature, properties, and function of all the material objects or substances in the universe, like fruits, flowers, crops, animals, birds, earth, sun etc. It expounds on the attributes of the Almighty and about the nature of soul (living beings). It talks about what materials can be used for our well-being. It talks about the qualities of a good king, parents, teachers, and society at large. There are several hymns dedicated to various deities, that is, the Almighty in different roles like Brahma, Indra, Agni, Vishnu, Surya etc. Rig Veda also contains knowledge of cosmology, universe, stars, constellations, astrology etc.

2. **Yajur-Ved** contains 1975 mantras. These mantras are read in poetic form. It discusses how to worship Eeshwar/God, company of learned and charity. It contains knowledge about rituals, rites, and procedures for specific ceremonies. Yajur-Ved focuses on the practical usage and benefits of the knowledge obtained, their implementation and their conduciveness to the wellbeing of the individual. It revolves around the implementation of all kinds of knowledge, education of children, Yajnya (noble actions), workmanship, architecture, engineering, medical and other sciences, politics etc. It also talks about worldly and divine selfless actions.

3. **Sam-Ved** contains 1875 mantras. These mantras are sung musically. Sam-Ved is the mother of classical Indian music and dance. It mainly deals with worship of the Almighty that is Upasana, meditation and Yog, acquisition of knowledge and happy life. It explains how to experience Eeshwar/God and how to attain peace and contentment in life and salvation.
4. **Atharv-Ved** has 5977 mantras. These mantras are read in poetic form. These mantras contain in depth details of all the objects of creation and various aspects of life, expansion of knowledge of various objects, science in detail, fulfillment of the knowledge of other three Vedas, their protection and expansion and solution to various doubts. It contains information about medical treatment, surgeries, and knowledge of diseases of the body. It also deals with the education of children, marriage, last rites, settling disputes etc. There is no evidence of black magic, witchcraft, or spells in Atharva Veda. When all doubts are cleared a person becomes Atharva that is unshaken as he has solid knowledge of everything.

CONCEPT OF TRAITAVAD OR THREE ETERNAL ENTITIES

As the main doctrine of Arya Samaj is based on Vedas, they believe in Traitavad (trinity) where there are three distinct everlasting entities, Eeshwar/God, Soul and Prakriti, but at no time, they are unrelated or separate from each other.

1. **Eeshwar/God** – is eternal, everlasting, super conscious, all pervading, holy, blissful, omnipotent (mighty) and limitless. All his activities and attributes are nothing but

truth. He has no second, he is incomparable, omnipresent, beginning less, endless, imperishable, blissful, just, merciful, unborn, unchangeable, and fearless. He is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. He is the dispenser of rewards and punishment depending upon virtuous or vicious deeds of all beings. Eeshwar/God's primary or natural name is AUM pronounced as OM. AUM stands for creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. There are other innumerable names of Eeshwar/God depending upon his attributes and characteristics. As the Eeshwar/God can do his work without a materialistic body and he is ever existent there is no concept of reincarnation in Vedas. Proof of the existence of Eeshwar/God lies in the fact that who else could create such a magnificent animate and inanimate universe. A sense of joy when one performs a benevolent act and a sense of fear, shame, and guilt when one commits a crime is another indication of the existence of Eeshwar/God. Praying Eeshwar/God is to impress upon one's own mind as to the attributes of Eeshwar/God and alter our conduct accordingly.

2. **Soul** – It is the everlasting conscious entity or Atma. The soul is not a part of Eeshwar/God. Its knowledge, actions and powers are limited. There are innumerable souls in the universe, but their number is fixed. They are miniscule in nature. They are conscious entities and occupy no space. Starting from single cell microorganisms to giant animals to human beings, they all have souls. They all have the power of desire, feelings, pleasure, pain, thinking and making efforts. The power which makes these inanimate beings function is called Atma or Soul. Soul enters a body at the time of conception and

leaves the body at the time of death carrying with it its subtle body. The physical body in its animate or living state reaps the rewards of its karmas or deeds. Though the soul is a free agent and has power to act on its own, it is guided by the inner voice. Good karmas make you feel joyous while bad karmas make one feel shameful and afraid. Soul being finite in nature, it stays at one place as compared to the Eeshwar/God who is all pervading. As per Vedic belief, residence of the soul is in the emotional center in the chest close to the heart area where a person feels compassion and love etc.

3. **Prakriti or primordial matter** – It is the material cause of the universe. It is an everlasting inanimate entity and lacks consciousness. Being inanimate, it cannot do anything by itself. Because of His influence and grace, gross changes take place in the inert matter and the creation starts. That leads to the formation of the solar system with stars, planets, and satellites etc. With creation the Soul also gets a material body. The Soul must have a materialistic or worldly body to perform any actions and to reap the rewards of its karmas or actions. Everything inanimate at the time of dissolution, reverts to fundamental inert matter or primordial state.

CONCEPT OF KARMAS OR ACTIONS

Karma means any action, work or deed which has its effects and consequences. Whatever happens to a person happens because he caused it to happen by his deeds. Eeshwar/God has laid down the rules which are precise, strict, uncompromising, and impartial. Eeshwar/God being omnipresent, He observes everyone's actions. A good action

brings good rewards, an exceptionally great action may lead one to salvation and a bad action may lead one to failures in life and miseries. Karmas of previous life may manifest in this life or future lives and karmas of this life similarly may manifest in this or in future lives. Though one cannot change the rewards of past karmas, but because of intellect and discriminatory powers, by doing good deeds (Nishkaam Karma) one can change the future course materially and spiritually and may even achieve salvation. Because of past karmas, one could be born in a wealthy and spiritual family, poor and miserable family or even as an animal. The aim of human life is to do exceptionally good karmas to achieve Moksha or salvation and get away from cycles of births and deaths.

REBIRTH

Anyone who is born must die. The soul is an everlasting entity while the inanimate body is short lived. The soul must acquire a new body after each death to reap the rewards of its Karmas or actions. This is called rebirth. It can take two different routes. If the soul has done exceptionally good and virtuous deeds, or Karmas in human life, has removed all the negative tendencies of mind, has communion with Eeshwar/God, and has acquired righteous knowledge, it can achieve salvation or moksha. It goes to the realms of the Almighty where it lives in a state of bliss for millions of human years (see footnote, page-13). After completion of this cycle, the soul again gets a materialistic body. It becomes a free agent to commit good or bad deeds. If the soul has not done so well, it keeps on going through cycles of births and deaths. Where the soul goes again, depends on karmas of this or previous life. The soul carries traits within

its subtle body and reaps the rewards in the current birth or the future births. If a person has done virtuous deeds, he will be born in a virtuous and noble family, and if he pursues the same ideals and contemplates on the Almighty, he may achieve salvation. A soul which has done adverse karmas is born into an abominable family or as an animal.

DEITY OR IDOL WORSHIP

Arya Samaj does not oppose emulating great historical personalities as a source of divine concentration and achievements but does not believe in treating deities as physical beings, bathed, dressed, fed, and given offerings. People with personal interests at stake made some unusual Gods and assigned them some miraculous powers like splitting the moon, getting water spring out of a rock, splitting the sea, walking on water, or turning stone into a woman. Interestingly enough, no person has ever seen any of those miracles in his life.

STATUS OF WOMEN

As per Vedic teachings, women are the embodiment of great intellect and virtues. The society where women are respected, divinity blossoms there and where women are happy, there is prosperity. Marriage is a union between two equals, that is men and women, so they both enjoy equal status in the society.

FASTING AND SELF-PUNISHMENT

Fasting done any day depending on a person's ability and need, for health reasons is a good practice. Eeshwar/ God does not want anyone to starve or punish themselves

to please Him. Religious self-penance is practiced in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and various sects of Hinduism. This penance is done in the form of prolonged fasting, bloodletting, self-whipping, hook swinging, fire walking, and even suicide. Arya Samaj strongly condemns these practices. Arya Samaj believes in righteous, happy, healthy, and prosperous living to the fullest extent. Similarly, Arya Samaj does not believe in any superstitions.

GURU

A guru is a real teacher who imparts knowledge and guides students on to a righteous path and not one who promises the world and bluffs. Arya Samaj suggests students to pay respect to the real teachers, however, rejects the idea of following a teacher blindly. No one knows everything in the world. Trust your own intellect and judgment depending on the evidence available. In some religious traditions when a guru dies, one of his disciples gets his chair (gaddi) and becomes guru, whether qualified or not. Following a teacher blindly is gurudom. Arya Samaj strongly disapproves of this practice.

SPIRITS, GHOSTS OR BHOOTS

Once a person is dead, they are gone, that is bhoot (past). Inanimate bodies are either cremated or buried. At this juncture the soul becomes free from gross body. Depending on soul's past karmas, either it achieves salvation and goes to the realms of the Almighty, or it re-enters the cycles of births and deaths acquiring a new body each time, to reap the rewards of its past deeds. As per Arya Samaj, there are no spirits or ghosts wandering around shadowing or terrifying a person or a family. Scientifically there is no

proof of the existence of spirits or ghosts. Similarly, Arya Samaj does not believe in mahurats (auspicious times), influence of stars and planets on an individual and horoscopes.

ANIMAL SACRIFICE

Not eating meat is a practice more sacred than the most sacred religious practices ever known and those who refrain from killing animals and eating are worthy of veneration. Though lots of Vedic verses or hymns have been misinterpreted, even then there is abundance of evidence in support against animal sacrifice and flesh eating. As per Vedic teachings animals are our friends and it is our sacred duty to perform Bali-vaishwa-dev Yajnya (ref. page17) daily, that is to take care of them.

CONCEPT OF VARNA VYAVASTHA (CASTE SYSTEM)

As per Vedas, varna vyavastha (caste system) is based on the strength of merits, aptitude, and avocation one follows and not on the hierarchy as practiced in medieval times and even recently to some extent. The sole purpose of designing varna vyavastha was to perform one's duties righteously for the betterment of the society and peaceful coexistence. The duties assigned to various varnas are as follows.

1. **Braahmans or spiritually knowledgeable** - Who stands out best among the bests is a brahmin. These are intellectuals, teachers, and priests. It is their responsibility to see that the society is heading in the right direction. Any person with true knowledge and righteous activ-

ities, even from the lowest class can elevate himself to the top class. A brahmin leads a consecrated way of life. He has righteous spiritual and materialistic knowledge and teaches the same. He worships the Almighty, keeps good company, performs Yajnyas and assists others in doing so. He is the spiritual guide to the rest of society

2. **Kshatriyas, warriors, or the ruling class** - They are righteous, knowledgeable, impartial, and charitable. They establish rules of law. They bear arms whenever needed to protect the people and the nation. Their primary goal is to achieve victory by any means to save themselves, people, and the country. They are granted political powers with the hope that they will use the power wisely and fairly, making sure that justice is served.

3. **Vaishyas or Merchants** - They could be farmers, merchants, or business owners. They supply commodities to the society and lend money to the needy. It is expected of them to be honest, righteous, spiritual, and charitable

4. **Shoodras or peasants** - They are gifted with dexterity, endurance, and manual working skills. They are expected to serve the rest of society honestly and diligently and make righteous living.

PURUSHARTHAS OR GOALS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

A righteous person or the society should strive for the following goals.

1. **Dharma or righteousness**- truthfulness in words, actions and thoughts is called dharma and it is in conformity with the will of Eeshwar/God.
2. **Artha or prosperity** – attainment of righteously acquired material or spiritual wealth is called Artha.
3. **Kama or enjoyment** – enjoyment of legitimate desires with the help of honestly acquired wealth is Kama.
4. **Moksha or salvation** – attainment of freedom from cycles of births and deaths, pains and sufferings and finally achieving ultimate bliss, salvation, or Moksha. In this state the soul has unbroken communion with Eeshwar/God. The soul stays in Moksha for an extended period of time, that is millions of human years*. After completion of this stage, the soul comes back to the material universe, acquires a new body, new parents and new family and is ready to indulge in karmas.

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* Duration of Moksha has been quoted by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati in chapter 9 of Satyarth Prakash from Mundakopanishad (Mundak-3, Section-2, Mantra-6). A chaturyuga is one cycle of four yugas or ages and is equal to 4320000 human years. 2000 such cycles make one day (24 hours) of Brahma, that is 8640000000 human years and 36000 such days make one hundred years(life span) of Brahma. This is 311 trillion and 40 billion human years. At the end of each day there is complete annihilation of the universe. The whole firmament is all dark and void. After an equal amount of time the creation starts again. A liberated soul stays in bliss for the life span of Brahma that is 311 trillion and 40 billion years. When the cycle of creation starts again it acquires a new body as per prior deeds and becomes a free agent to act.

CONCEPT OF LIFE STAGES OR ASHRAMS

To achieve the above goals in life, the lifespan of a person is divided into four phases. These phases complement each other. As per Vedic teachings each person ideally should go through all these stages.

1. **Brahmacharya (life of celibacy)** - This stage is meant for perfecting one's body and acquiring knowledge. Between age 5-8 a child starts living under the guidance of a teacher in a gurukul to acquire both spiritual and materialistic knowledge for righteous and prosperous living. During this period, he is supposed to acquire skills for life, practice devotion to his teacher, live a celibate life and perform Yajnyas. He prepares himself for his future profession, family, social and religious life ahead. This stage lasts till 25 to 30 years of age.

2. **Grihasth ashram (life of a house holder)** - Grihasth ashram is considered to be the pillar or the backbone of rest of ashrams. After studies are over, it is time to get married. Attempt is always to marry people of matching nature, qualities, and goals. In this stage one takes responsibility for making a righteous living and having and supporting the family. He is also held responsible for supporting other ashrams by providing monetary and physical help. This stage lasts up till 50 - 60 years of age. A house holder is advised to perform five Mahayajnyas (ref. page 15) daily besides taking care of his profession, personal, and family needs.

3. **Vaanaprasth ashram** - This is the third phase of life which starts when children have their own children. This occurs at retirement age between 50 and 60 years. He gives up his job, his wealth, possession, family life, and social life, and moves to a secluded place where he can lead a spiritual life. He gets involved in studying scriptures, practice Yog and meditation and search for divine wisdom. His spouse may accompany him but when he is ready to enter sannyaas his spouse goes back to live with her children.

4. **Sannyaas ashram (renunciation)** - This is the fourth stage of life where a person renounces everything. He has no home, no family, no worldly desires, no duties, and no responsibilities. He is righteous, honest, kind to all living beings, and possesses self restraint. He wanders around going places, teaching moral values and meditation, and spreading knowledge of scriptures. He lives on food and offerings given by the householders. At this stage his aim is to practice the highest state of Yog and meditation to achieve bliss or liberation from cycles of births and deaths. This stage is primarily for the learned, right after Brahmacharya ashram, Vaanprastha ashram or for the Braahmans who have all the right knowledge and can clear doubts about religion and scriptures for the public.

PANCH MAHAYAJNYAS OR FIVE NOBLE ACTIONS

Yajnya is an action performed without any self-intent or attachment. They are performed for self-upliftment,

as a duty to all mankind, other living beings, and mother earth. All Aryas are expected to perform these five Yajnyas daily. These duties are as follows.

1. **Brahma-Yajnya**-Brahma Yajnya entails studying and teaching of Vedas, scriptures, practicing twilight meditation and eight limbs of Yog (Patanjali). Anyone should be able to perform brahma Yajnya. It has moral and spiritual values. It calms the mind down and provides divine strength to the soul.

2. **Deva-Yajnya or Agnihotra**-Dev-Yajnya is the performance of fire ritual or oblations with wood, clarified butter, and herbs to purify body and mind and to purify atmosphere for a healthy living for everyone. We pray for physical, mental, and spiritual perfection for everyone. Scientifically burning wood with clarified butter and herbs frees the atmosphere of noxious smell, reduces bacterial content of surrounding air, and ultimately helps causation of rain. Material (inert matter an ever-existent entity) offered in fire is never destroyed. It is converted into its subtle form causing beneficial effects.

3. **Pitri-Yajnya or eldercare** -This Yajnya is taking care of parents and elderly, fulfilling their needs, and treating them with respect. Shraaddh and Tarpan are treating living parents and elders with reverence. This act elevates the individual spiritually and empowers younger generation with values. Arya Samaj does not believe in performing Shraaddh and Tarpan after the death of parents as all the donations given on their name go to the unscrupulous persons and not the needy.

4. **Atithi-Yajnya or hospitality**-A person of impeccable character, well educated, and well versed in scriptures is

a real Atithi or a worthy guest. It is an obligation to take care of wandering sannyasis or learned persons if they come to a house holder's dwelling even if uninvited.

5. **Balivaishvadev-Yajnya or subservient care** - Bali stands for part of self-earned money, Yajnya means offerings, and Vaishwadeva stands for the needy whether human beings or animals. They all contribute to our lives in one or the other ways. So, it is our responsibility to take care and to protect the deserving to the best of our ability like starving, insane, destitute, blind, weak, and animals etc

YOG AND MEDITATION

As per Vedic teachings, Yog and meditation are mandatory for a healthy body and a sound mind. The general belief that Yog is learning different postures and performing exercises is far from the truth. As per sage Patanjali there are eight limbs of Yog. Practicing these limbs appropriately, one can not only have a sound body and sound mind but also can achieve self-realization, divine bliss, or salvation. These limbs are –

1. **Yam or restraints** – these are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non- hoarding.
2. **Niyam or observances** – cleanliness of body and mind, contentment, austerity, acquisition of true knowledge and its dissemination and resignation to the will of Eeshwar/God.
3. **Asana or meditative postures** – to purify and improve body and mind.
4. **Pranayama** or regulation of breathing.

5. **Pratyahara** - control of one's senses.
6. **Dhaarnaa** – Focusing on various parts of the body and concentrating on the Almighty.
7. **Dhyaan** or meditation.
8. **Samadhi or trance** – this is the final stage of Yog where one can realize self and the Eeshwar/God.

SANSKAARS OR SACRAMENTS

There are sixteen sacraments or rites of passage prescribed in Vedas and expounded by various rishis. These sacraments mark important stages in one's life and enable one to have a fulfilling life complete with happiness and contentment. They pave the way to grow and prosper in all aspects of human pursuit like, Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth), Kama (pleasure) and Moksha (salvation). These sacraments start from the time of conception and continue till death.

1. **Garbhadhan (conception)**- This ritual is performed with the hope and blessings to have healthy children.
2. **Punsavan** –This ritual is performed at 3 months of pregnancy praying for the life and safety of the fetus.
3. **Semantonnayan** – This ceremony is performed during the last month of pregnancy to evoke Eeshwar/God's blessings for normal and full-term development of the fetus, safe delivery and well being of the mother.
4. **Jaatakarm** – This is a birth ceremony of the newly born, accepting him/her as an individual being.
5. **Naam-karan** – Naming ceremony is observed on eleventh days after birth. This gives the newborn a mean-

ingful identity with which he or she will be associated all his or her life.

6. **Nishkraman** – This ceremony is performed at 4 months of age when the baby is taken out of the house for the first time to sunbathe.
7. **Annapraashan** – This ritual is performed at 6 months of age when the child is fed solid food for the first time.
8. **Choodaakarm / Mundan** – In this ceremony the baby's hair is cut for the first time and immersed in a river.
9. **Karnavedh or Ear-piercing** – This is a ritual where children get their ears pierced.
10. **Upanayan or Yajnyopaveet Sanskaar** - This is a very important Sanskaar where children are adorned with sacred thread. This thread is passed around from the left side of the neck to the waist on the right side. This is the time when youngsters are prepared to go to an educational institution.
11. **Vedaarambh, Vidyarambh or Schooling** – This ritual is performed when a child is initiated into studies. Children are supposed to go to live with their preceptors till the completion of their studies.
12. **Samaavartan Sanskaar or graduation** - This Sanskaar is performed when studies are completed, and the young adult is ready to come home from an educational institution.
13. **Vivaah or marriage ceremony** – A ceremony of marriage after which an individual enters a conjugal life or the life of a house holder. This is a very important stage as in

where a person procreates and makes righteous living. This stage also supports the rest of the ashrams.

14. **Vaanaprasth or retirement** - This is celebrated at 50 to 60 years of age when a person leaves his duties as a householder and departs to a secluded place away from family for spiritual studies, introspection, and reassessment of goals of life.

15. **Sannyas or renunciation**– At age around 75 after vanaprastha, the person gets away from worldly duties dedicating the remaining life to the service of humanity, living on alms and meditating.

16. **Antyeshti or funeral rites** – This is the final rites of passage performed by the family after the death of a person. Placing fire around the body is called Agni Parigrah Sanskaar and the dead body is dedicated to the fire.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I was unable to find English equivalents of many words, I have tried to use words as close as possible for the sake of easy understanding and clarity. This booklet contains only miniscule of information about Arya Samaj and Vedas. There have been innumerable commentaries written on Vedas by Indian and international scholars to expound and explain the divine knowledge embedded in these books. To satisfy one's curiosity there is a vast amount of material available in books, various magazines and of course google. Here I would humbly suggest studying Satyarth Prakash (Light of Truth) and Rigved-aadi-bhaashya-bhumika (English translation) written by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati for a true and righteous knowledge about the subject matter.

My sincere and humble hope is that after reading this booklet one may be motivated enough to read some of the literature available so as to broaden their knowledge about the Vedic culture.

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Vedas are the cornerstone of Vedic civilization. Whether imparted by the Almighty or inspired by the learned sages of the past, they contain all true and righteous knowledge for the wellbeing of all the living souls and nature. It is really disheartening to know that this repository of celestial knowledge was kept away from the common men over the last 3000 years.

At worst, because of poor knowledge of Vedic Sanskrit and grammar, translations done by some of the Indian scholars were erroneous to the point of being illogical and irrational. Lots of international scholars got on the same bandwagon to denigrate the scriptures. We are deeply indebted to Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati for his lifelong pursuit for the revival of Vedas and bringing forth the true and righteous knowledge to the common men.